

A CALCULATED LOSS OF DIGNITY

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: John 19: 17-30.

Many people know the pain of having to sort out the clothes and other possessions belonging to a loved one after they have passed away. It can seem so disrespectful to us, even though they are no longer there, to give away precious things or take them to the charity shop. It would be inconceivable to us to do this sorting out while the person was still alive or was actually there in the house with us. It would seem so disrespectful and such an affront to their dignity.

Yet this is what the Lord Jesus has to endure when, as He is in the process of being crucified. He has to endure the soldiers at the foot of the cross, talking, in His hearing, about who will have what of His belongings. This is callous behaviour and so lacking in any sense of the dignity of the Person whose things they are. It is a sign of how the personhood and dignity of our Saviour was utterly laid waste through the things that He had to experience.

1. He had real dignity.

Our Lord's was real, not imagined dignity. Some people put on airs and graces to try to pass themselves off as being higher status than they are. The Lord Jesus had a self-evident dignity and was worthy of all respect. We feel so unworthy by comparison with Him.

He had an innate dignity by virtue of being God. As such, He is royalty in its finest sense and meaning. He is an absolutely upright and just King and Ruler. He is true and incorruptible. He has great moral worth and immense purity (see, for example, Exodus 34:6-7 and Isaiah 6: 1-5). He lives in another sphere, on a higher plane. He has an innate majesty and lives far above any of us.

Our Lord also has innate dignity as the word made flesh. Here there is the dignity of deity lived out before the gaze of people on earth. This was revealed to all who saw Him alongside His perfect humanity. This was all lived out without violation to either of His two natures. He was a fully integrated person, both God and man, having the dignity which goes with both. We learn this in Hebrews 7:26 and also from Peter's comments in Luke 5:8 where he recognizes His dignity.

2. Suffering huge indignity.

Christ's dignity suffered huge dishonour and disrespect through the experience of the cross. His dignity was brought low and ridiculed. This was always destined to be what would happen. He was going to be a stumbling block to many people. Their reaction of contempt towards Him would reveal who they really were (Luke 2:34; Luke 20:17-18; and 1 Peter 2:6-7). People would injure themselves as they attempted to discredit Him. Men denied His claims to deity. They denied His claims to authoritatively interpret the law. They would dishonour Him in all ways imaginable (John 8:49).

Then, during the last days of His life, He would suffer from betrayal by a close associate, denial by his leading disciple and desertion when arrested. He would have to suffer the indignity of an unfair trial where His rights were denied Him. He would be surrounded by cruelty, murder, envy and pure evil. He would suffer the indignity of the worst kind of death, reserved for the most wicked people or those deemed to be most unworthy. It was a death that maximized shame and public exposure. It allowed people to watch as one died a slow and excruciatingly painful death. He would have people crudely sorting through His belongings and talking as if He was not there or was already dead.

Beyond these visible sufferings He was to suffer something even more as He bore the sins of His people. All the leading up to this were marking Him out as the Lord's servant, the One who was destined to bring relief to His people. He was to willingly suffer the indignity as being treated by His Father as though He was the chief of sinners. He would be treated with divine displeasure and disapproval, as though not loved. He would face pain, misery, forsakenness and feel in His soul the thirst and hunger of hell. In this unique transaction, and as part of what was agreed with the Father, He would be deprived of communion with God. His soul would be bereft of comfort and joy. He would experience an inner bleakness and loss of prospects. His sufferings would be judicial and penal.

3. Dignity restored and our dignity gained.

His dignity was permitted to be concealed in large measure from us. It was to be His lot to be misunderstood and not properly recognized. But the resurrection was to be His vindication and restoration. He would be highlighted as a good Person doing a good work.

Through Him, we gain a dignity we never had in the first place. People behave as if they are not answerable to anyone but themselves. In their pride they think they can say and do what they want. People take pride in their own skills, looks, achievements and think they are deserving of being treated with dignity by others, even by God. Yet we fail to think and reason properly. Otherwise, we would realize that we were undone in the

sight of God and had no dignity in His sight. We fondly imagined we were in the favour of God when, in truth, the opposite was the case.

But if we accept the necessity of what He had to endure in order that we might be saved from our sin, then we can be received by God into fellowship with Him. We have the dignity conferred upon us of being sons of God (Romans 8:15-17). We are given gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. Through this we receive real dignity and a place in the sight of God. We are able to move forward to real holiness of life and thought. It is the way to lasting happiness and to new life in Christ.